DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 326 154 HE 024 056

AUTHOR Hymel, Glenn M.
TITLE Philosophical Psychology in the Undergraduate Curriculum: An Inexcusable Neglect.
PUB DATE Mar 89
NOTE 17p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Southern Society for Philosophy and Psychology (New Orleans, LA, March 1989).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Viewpoints (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Course Content; *Curriculum Development; Higher Education; Majors (Students); *Philosophy; *Psychology; Student Educational Objectives; Undergraduate Study
IDENTIFIERS *Philosophical Psychology

ABSTRACT

The almost total neglect of philosophical psychology as an area of curricular focus in undergraduate programs for the psychology major is examined. Three perspectives from which philosophical psychology may be addressed are surveyed and include: (1) the philosophy of mind; (2) problems indigenous to both philosophy and psychology; and (3) the classical Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition. The paper discusses philosophical psychology in terms of its nature and scope, its methodology, comparison with experimental psychology, and its importance. It is recommended that coursework of a multidisciplinary nature be introduced, focusing on historical figures and systems to augment scientific psychology. A more immediate intervention might take the form of simply supplementing conventional coverage in general psychology courses and history/systems psychology courses with material appropriate to one or more of the three perspectives that philosophical psychology may assume. Includes 20 references. (DB)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED326154

Philosophical Psychology in the Undergraduate Curriculum: An Inexcusable Neglect

Glenn M. Hymel

Loyola University of New Orleans

Running head: PHILOSOPHICAL PSYCHOLOGY IN THE UNDERGRADUATE CURRICULUM

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Glenn M. Hymel

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Southern Society for Philosophy and Psychology, New Orleans, March 1989.

HE 024 058

Abstract

The almost total neglect of philosophical psychology as an area of curricular focus in undergraduate programs is examined. Three perspectives from which philosophical psychology may be addressed are surveyed with particular attention being given to a classical orientation emphasizing the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition. The nature, scope, methodology, and importance of philosophical psychology are briefly discussed with a view toward augmenting the experimental or scientific dimension of contemporary psychology. Finally, recommendations are advanced for rectifying the current neglect of this foundational area of psychology.

Philosophical Psychology in the Undergraduate Curriculum: An Inexcusable Neglect

Contemporary psychology is all too often identified in an overly-restricted sense with a science of behavior that relies exclusively on an experimental-inductive methodology for investigating the activity (behavior) of organisms. This predominant orientation in psychology today is considered here as problematic in at least two ways.

First of all, the scientific feature of psychology seems to be consistently thought of in the modernness narrow fashion that is limited to detailed observations, the formulations of predictions, the design of experiments, meticulous measurements, statistical analyses, the presumption of determinism in its object, and the explanation/control of events within certain probability margins of error. This approach to psychology as an experimental science is appropriate as far as it goes; however, the proverbial "fly in the ointment" here is that it does not go quite far enough. Apparently lost in our discipline today is the consideration of psychology also as a science in the classically broad sense that emphasizes a systematically structured body of knowledge that is

(a) focused ultimately on the essence and causation of things and (b) demonstrated by either deductive or inductive reasoning methods.

Secondly, and somewhat as a consequence of the myopic view of science just mentioned, there appears to be in our profession today an avoidance of our historical indebtedness to philosophy as a parent discipline. Part of the faulty reasoning here seems to be the belief that there is something inherently contradictory in psychology capitalizing on both experimental science and philosophical science for its focus and methodology. Such a dichotomous view is false and serves only to deprive psychology of an intellectually rich tradition that has the potential to complement--not threaten--the equally crucial role played by experimental science. What follows in this paper is an attempt to characterize briefly not only the nature, scope, and methodology of philosophical psychology but also its relevance in the context of an undergraduate psychology curriculum today.

Philosophical Psychology: Three Perspectives

Even a cursory review of the literature available on philosophical psychology uncovers three distinct yet overlapping perspectives from which this topic may be considered. These orientations may be labelled as follows: (a) the philosophy of mind, (b) problems indigenous to both

philosophy and psychology, and (c) the classical Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition.

Philosophy of mind. Perhaps the most current vantage point from which philosophical psychology may be addressed is that of the philosophy of mind (see, e.g., Smith & Jones, 1986). Shaffer (1987) acknowledges the distinctively human feature of mind and surveys the range of issues in the philosophy of mind in the following way:

> One attribute that sharply distinguishes man from the rest of nature is his highly developed capacity for thought, feeling, and deliberate action. Here and there in other animals, rudiments, approximations, and limited elements of this capacity may occasionally be found; but the full-blown development that is called a mind is unmatched elsewhere in nature.
>
> The task assumed by the discipline known as the philosophy of mind is to examine and analyze those concepts that involve the mind (including the very concept of the mind itself) in an attempt to discover the nature of each of these concepts, the relations between them, how they are to be classified, and how they are to be related to certain other concepts--especially to the concepts of matter and energy, the human body, and, in particular, the central nervous system.

> It should be clear that the range of topics in the philosophy of mind goes far beyond what is intended in everyday discourse by 'mind.' When, for example, the layman speaks of someone as having 'a good mind' or as pursuing 'the pleasures of the mind,' he is thinking of those particular activities that have to do with abstract reasoning, intellectual pursuits, and the exercise of intelligence. The 'mind,' as the term is used . . . in the philosophy of mind in general today, encompasses sensation and perception, feeling and emotion, dreams, traits of character and personality, the unconscious, and the volitional aspects of human life, as well as the more narrowly intellectual phenomena, such as thought, memory, and belief. (p. 116)

Problems in philosophy and psychology. A second prevalent orientation from which philosophical psychology develops is that of focusing on problems indigenous to both philosophy and psychology. Eacker (1975), for example, identifies and examines the following 13 philosophical problems of psychology: the mind-body problem, metaphysics, reification, explanation, causality, theory, laws and principles, anthropomorphism, purpose, freedom, knowledge, induction, and the fact-value

problem. In the context of these shared problem areas, Eacker goes on to note that

> historically, psychology has moved from an almost exclusive preoccupation with philosophical problems to the point at which it nearly denies them. This situation probably developed normally in the course of the evolution of psychology away from philosophy toward natural science. However, many if not all of the philosophical problems still persist in at least some form within psychology today, and so a close consideration of them is in order if only for purposes of clarification. (1975, p. 6)

Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition. The third vantage point from which one may address philosophical psychology is that of the classical orientation found in the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition. While this approach is undoubtedly the most extensively ignored in contemporary psychology today, it is still the foundation upon which psychology rests whenever philosophy is discussed as our parent discipline. Furthermore, it is from this Greco-Christian tradition that psychology is etymologically defined as "the science (logos) of the soul (psyche)." Also, philosophical psychology as articulated in this tradition is the complement to experimental

psychology alluded to in the introduction and, hence, calls for a more detailed discussion.

Philosophical Psychology: The Aristotelian-Thomistic Tradition

Its nature and scope. According to Donceel (1967), "philosophical psychology may be defined as the science of living bodies which interprets the data of experience in the light of metaphysical principles" (p. 2). An elaboration on this definition, of course, is in order. "Science," here, is meant in the classically broad sense vis-a-vis the modernness restricted sense as discussed earlier. The "data of experience" encompass not only that supplied by the common experience of living everyday but also the vast investigative findings of experimental science as applied to psychology. The expression "metaphysical principles" refers to criteria in the branch of philosophy concerned with reality that govern the nature/essence of living organisms as well as their causation. (This latter point also relates to the methodology of philosophical psychology and is discussed shortly.)

A broad-based characterization, then, of the expression philosophical psychology as employed here would be as follows: it is an "a posteriori" science in that one relies on the direct and immediate experience of living operations, the causation of which is considered in an ultimate as opposed

to proximate sense and, hence, incorporates the concept of soul as the vital life principle of animate beings (Anable, 1947; cf., also: Adler, 1937, 1967, 1978, 1985; Brennan, 1941, 1945; Donceel, 1961, 1967; Reith, 1956; Royce, 1961).

Its methodology. The earlier reference to "metaphysical principles" also bears upon the methodology of philosophical psychology in the following way. As already pointed out, one objective of philosophical psychology is to investigate the ultimate nature or essence of living beings; yet, we have no direct perception/experience of essences. How, then, is one to make this type of ultimate discernment regarding the nature or essence of an organism? The methodological appeal here, as observed by Anable (1947), is to the metaphysical axiom "operatio sequitur esse"; that is,

> from the way in which a being acts we attempt to determine what that being is. These acts are effects produced by living beings. Since there must be a proportion between the effect produced and the cause which produces that effect, we can learn much of the nature and perfection of a particular cause, or type of cause, from the nature and perfection of the effect it produces. (p. xviii)

In a similar fashion, Royce (1961) characterizes this methodological movement as progressing from what man does

(easily observable facts of man's behavior and experience) to what he can do (abilities, powers, or proximate principles of operation) to what kind of being he is (nature, essence, ultimate principles of being).

Anable (1947) goes on to note that in the logical order (i.e., the order of things as we know them), we are first aware of the activities of an organism and then argue to the nature/essence of the organism that empowers it to carry on such operations. However, in the real or ontological (metaphysical) order (i.e., the order of things as they are in themselves), the living organism first is actually in existence and then acts. Therefore,

> in the ontological order, life in its first actuality ('in actu primo') is that nature or essence which gives a living being the power to perform living operations. These subsequent activities or operations as an actual, concrete manifestation of life constitute life in its second actuality ('in actu secundo'). (pp. xviii-xix)

Philosophical and experimental psychology compared. The exclusive concern of experimental (scientific) psychology is life "in actu secundo," i.e., with the operations/activities of organisms; in the case of philosophical psychology the focus is primarily on life "in actu primo," i.e., on the nature/essence that gives an organism the power to engage in certain operations (Anable, 1947).

Importance of philosophical psychology. Based on the preceding discussion, the value of philosophical psychology--particularly as developed from the classical tradition--is indeed multifaceted. First, its inclusion in the professional preparation of psychologists is crucial to a balanced perspective on our discipline in that it acknowledges psychology's historical origin and essential focus. Secondly, philosophical psychology is complementary to--not in competition with--experimental or scientific psychology. Thirdly, philosophical psychology has the potential to provide insight regarding the nature, origin, responsibility, and destiny of humankind. Fourthly, it can give a proper background for and orientation to various applied psychology specialties (e.g., educational psychology, clinical and counseling psychology, school psychology, and I/O psychology). Fifthly, philosophical psychology can provide a framework within which controversies such as the following might be more comprehensively debated: the self-determination feature of a Rogerian approach to psychotherapy, the radical determinism of Skinnerian behaviorism, and the criticism of Freudian psychoanalysis that is rooted in the paucity of experimental verification.

Philosophical Psychology and the Undergraduate Curriculum

An inexcusable neglect. Three recent professional experiences of the author have had the impact of highlighting what can only be described as an inexcusable neglect regarding the existence of philosophical psychology in the undergraduate curriculum.

In a paper presented last year (Hymel, 1988), an attempt was made to acknowledge an undergraduate psychology course titled "Models of Human Behavior" that emphasizes a multidisciplinary approach by way of surveying the following ten theorists: Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, Aquinas, Marx, Freud, Sartre, Skinner, Rogers, and Lorenz. A fairly prevalent reaction to the presentation was one of questioning the appropriateness of including the first five theorists in view of the fact that they were all of the pre-Wundt era and his establishment of the first psychological laboratory at Leipzig in 1879. The gist of the comments, obviously, was that perhaps only individuals and systems post-1879 represented legitimate topical coverage in this undergraduate psychology offering.

The second eye-opening experience of recent vintage involved a departmental review last year of 34 general psychology textbooks for our introduction to psychology course. From the very first book reviewed (Atkinson, Atkinson, Smith, & Hilgard, 1987) to the very last one

(Zimbardo, 1988), the conventional coverage of the history and systems of psychology--typically in the first chapter--at best would make only a passing reference to philosophy as a parent discipline which essentially has nothing of substance to say to contemporary psychologists.

Finally, a review of several history of psychology textbooks (e.g., Koch & Leary, 1985; Leahey, 1987; Murray, 1988) essentially revealed the same trend; namely, relatively brief treatments of topics related to philosophical psychology that were more of the historical acknowledgment genre than a discussion of their value as a complement to everything that has transpired in scientific psychology.

Recommendations. The recommendations that follow from the case presented in this paper should be fairly apparent. One possible course of action for redressing the extreme neglect of philosophical psychology in the undergraduate curriculum could be that of introducing coursework of a multidisciplinary nature that specifically includes historical figures and systems that would augment scientific psychology in the fashion attributed to philosophical psychology. Of course, a perhaps more immediate intervention might take the form of simply supplementing the conventional coverage in general psychology and history/systems of psychology courses with additional material appropriate to any one or more of the three perspectives that philosophical psychology may assume.

Regardless of the strategy taken, it is apparent to at least this author that the undergraduate preparation of psychology majors could indeed be enriched if their professional schooling actively attempted to present our discipline as having fertile intellectual roots occurring several centuries earlier than Wundt's benchmark accomplishment at Leipzig in 1879.

References

Adler, M. J. (1937). What man has made of man: A study of the consequences of Platonism and positivism in psychology. New York: Longmans, Green, & Co.

Adler, M. J. (1967). The difference of man and the difference it makes. New York: Holt, Rinehart, & Winston.

Adler, M. J. (1978). Aristotle for everybody: Difficult thought made easy. New York: Macmillan Publ. Co.

Adler, M. J. (1985). Ten philosophical mistakes. New York: Macmillan Publ. Co.

Anable, R. J. (1947). Philosophical psychology. New York: Fordham University Press.

Atkinson, R. L., Atkinson, R. C., Smith, E. E., & Hilgard, E. R. (1987). Introduction to psychology (9th ed.). San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc.

Brennan, R. E. (1941). Thomistic psychology: A philosophic analysis of the nature of man. New York: Macmillan Co.

Brennan, R. E. (1945). History of psychology: From the standpoint of a Thomist. New York: Macmillan Co.

Donceel, J. F. (1961). Philosophical psychology (2nd ed., rev. ed.). New York: Sheed & Ward.

Donceel, J. F. (1967). Philosophical anthropology. New York: Sheed & Ward.

Eacker, J. N. (1975). Problems of philosophy and psychology. Chicago: Nelson-Hall.

Hymel, G. M. (1988, April). Models of human behavior: An interdisciplinary instructional focus. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Southwestern Psychological Association, Tulsa, OK.

Koch, S., & Leary, D. E. (Eds.). (1985). A century of psychology as science. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Leahey, T. H. (1987). A history of psychology: Main currents in psychological thought (2nd ed.). Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall.

Murray, D. J. (1988). A history of western psychology (2nd ed.). Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall.

Reith, H. (1956). An introduction to philosophical psychology. Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall.

Royce, J. E. (1961). Man and his nature: A philosophical psychology. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Shaffer, J. A. (1987). The philosophy of mind. In P. W. Goetz (Ed.), The new encyclopaedia britannica (Vol. 24) (pp. 116-126). Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc.

Smith, P., & Jones, O. R. (1986). The philosophy of mind: An introduction. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Zimbardo, P. G. (1988). Psychology and life (12th ed.). Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman, & Co.